

**HMS GUARDIAN AND THE ISLAND OF ICE – THE LOST SHIP OF THE FIRST FLEET AND LIEUTENANT EDWARD RIOU, 1789–1790.**

Rod Dickson. Carlisle, WA: Hesperian Press. 128 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-85905-511-6. 30 AUD

This book is a welcome addition to maritime literature, being always eventful and sustained by useful notes and explanations – backed by a fair amount of suspense. The reading is very instructive, entertaining and cannot be easily put down if interrupted.

The obvious hero of this saga is Captain Edward Riou, who had to fight an ice monster and who unfortunately came off second best. Captain Riou's name is of a distinctly French origin, in Brittany alone there are more than 8,000 people bearing this name, which means – 'living near a brook'.

According to the part played by the huge iceberg, in *Guardian's* story, it is almost unavoidable to evoke the wreck of *Titanic*. But the two dramas were very different in time and place: the one in the south Indian Ocean and the other in the North Atlantic and 120 years apart. *Titanic* was sunk by a rogue iceberg lying in wait whereas H.M.S. *Guardian* met her fate whilst collecting brash ice from around the base of the iceberg following the same idea that Captain Cook had some 20 years before.

The story of H.M.S. *Guardian* is in some ways more evocative of a Moby Dick story than of *Titanic* and could easily be written as a psychodrama in the Melville manner. The White Mountain of Ice is its White Whale and Captain Riou becomes Captain Ahab. Their meeting in the Southern Ocean is at first friendly but degenerates into drama when the weather turns foul. The mighty White Mountain of Ice can now take vengeance on these interlopers in her seas. The challenge now

is for Captain Riou to keep afloat his severely wounded ship and to save his crew.

But during their diverging navigation – the ship drifting towards South Africa and the Mountain of Ice – bound to nowhere in its circum-Antarctic drift, Captain Riou is beset with the solitude of command. For more than six weeks he has to encourage and sometimes threaten the men to keep the pumps going 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with virtually no food, unable to wash and little water. And if miracles can be achieved – then Captain Riou created his own little miracle and kept the vessel afloat to finally reach Table Bay. And still the drama played out as Riou attempted to save his command.

But to no avail and the ship was finally condemned and broken up. Captain Edward Riou and the men are now discharged to return to England, however the 20 Convicts on board were transferred to another Botany Bay bound vessel and on arrival in Sydney were given their freedom for their assistance to Riou. So Captain Riou and his men were the obvious winners in this harsh challenge generated by the hate of the Mountain of Ice for this tiny wretched wooden ship.

No information is given of the origin of the nice colour illustration of the cover and the location (St Paul's Cathedral) of the commemorative monument illustrated on page iv. Furthermore all references to pages found in the book indexes are wrong: a set of corrected pages 113–118 would be helpfully included in the copies still in stock.

As a result of the remarkable work done by Rod Dickson, this excellent book is both a nice tribute to the gallant and very heroic Edward Riou and most probably the definitive word on this famous epic of the sea. So it must be considered as a valuable addition to any public or private maritime library. (Patrick Arnaud, Le Jas des Batarins, 04110 Vachères, France, patrickarnaud8692@neuf.fr)